



# Great Lakes VA HEALTHVIEWS

*The Newsletter about Health for Veterans in VISN 12*

Volume 2, Issue 2

Summer 2004



## How We Treat Your Heart Attack

Dr. Peter Finch, MD  
Internist  
Tomah VAMC



Many of us have lost friends or relatives due to a sudden heart attack. Years ago, little could be done except to have the patient rest until the worst was over.

These days we have a much better understanding of how to prevent early heart attacks and deaths.

Having the bad luck to be a man (or a woman after menopause) increases your risk of heart attack. This is something you cannot change. But there are several things you can change.

- ♥ If you are a smoker, stop. Stopping smoking almost cuts in half the risk of heart attack or death over the next 10 years! Let us help - look into a smoking cessation class at your VA.

- ♥ Find out if you have high blood pressure. Treating high blood pressure reduces your risk of having a heart attack and stroke – or can delay it for years. As a result, more heart attacks happen for the first time in the patients age 70 or more and less often to people in their 50's (as used to be the case).
- ♥ If you have diabetes, keep your weight down and see your provider at least every year. Poor control of diabetes more than doubles your risk for heart attack.
- ♥ Eat more fruit and vegetables and less animal fats and solid starchy foods.
- ♥ Ask your provider about use of low dose aspirin.

A new term we use is “acute coronary syndrome.” It means a person is having a problem with his/her heart, possibly even a heart attack. Symptoms may include:

- ♥ A sudden onset of chest pain or pressure.
- ♥ Unexplained shortness of breath at rest, or with mild exercise.
- ♥ A feeling of indigestion or heartburn that may be described as “different.”

If you have these symptoms, go to the nearest Emergency Room right away. Your blood pressure, pulse, temperature and blood tests will be checked. An electrical tracing of your heart will be done immediately. This allows us to quickly find out what is happening and provide treatment.

**During this early treatment we may start:**

- ♥ Aspirin
- ♥ Clot-busting drugs
- ♥ Clot-preventing drugs
- ♥ Drugs to rest the heart and reduce the risk of sudden death

As we learn more about what goes wrong and how to fix it, we have found that a small number of people do much better with one or more of the following:

- ♥ Urgent mapping of the arteries.
- ♥ Sending blood to the heart muscle.
- ♥ Opening up the blockage and putting a tube-shaped stent to stop the blockage from forming again.

Early action can greatly reduce damage and prevent heart failure.

Learn about heart attacks at your doctor’s office or the clinic. Make a plan for what you will do to prevent an attack and how to react if you think you are having one. To help you, the VA is giving out a pamphlet “Time Is Life.” Look for it at your local VA hospital or Outreach Clinic.

**Remember, if you have:**

- ♥ Pressure type of chest pain
- ♥ Unexplained shortness of breath
- ♥ Pain in the jaw, throat and/or left arm

Or

If you suspect it’s  
“the real thing,”  
**call 911!**



# Quitting Tobacco

Dawn Rue, RRT  
Smoking Cessation Counselor  
Tomah, VAMC



Stopping the use of tobacco products is one of the best things you can do for your health. Tobacco users include:

- Cigarette smokers
- Cigar smokers
- Snuff and tobacco chewers

According to the American Lung Association, smoking is responsible for 87% of lung cancers. Tobacco use can also cause cancers of the mouth, kidney, throat, bladder, larynx, pancreas and esophagus.

Tobacco use is also a major factor in developing emphysema, chronic bronchitis, coronary heart disease and stroke.

## Facts about Quitting:

- People usually try to quit using tobacco several times before they are successful.
- Physical withdrawal from nicotine lasts only a few days.
- Getting used to life without tobacco takes an even longer period of time—weeks or months!
- Urges to use tobacco become further apart and less strong over time, but may happen for years.
- Physical health improves (lung function, blood pressure, circulation).
- Risk of coronary heart disease,

stroke,  
and cancer decreases.

## Methods of Quitting

### 1. Medicine:

- Nicotine patch
- Nicotine gum
- Nicotine inhaler
- Nicotine nasal spray
- Non-nicotine pill (Zyban<sup>®</sup>, Wellbutrin<sup>®</sup>, or bupropion)

### 2. Quitting “Cold Turkey” (stopping without any help).

### 3. Counseling or behavior change programs.

This helps to deal with the psychological addiction and offers strategies to cope with urges to smoke.

## Where to Get Help:

- ▶ Discuss quitting tobacco with your VA provider.
- ▶ Check to see if there is a Nicotine Anonymous meeting in your area.
- ▶ Contact the American Cancer Society at 1-800-227-2345 or [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)
- ▶ Contact the American Lung Association at 1-800-586-4872

## How to Live With COPD

Paulette Wheeler, RRT

Lisa DeWitt, RRT

Tomah, VAMC

**COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease) is a group of lung diseases that includes:**

- Chronic bronchitis
- Emphysema
- Chronic asthma

These diseases decrease airflow in and out of your lungs.

**COPD cannot be cured, but it can be treated with:**

- Medicine
- Breathing exercises or techniques
- Changes in lifestyle such as quitting smoking, moderately increasing exercise, and controlling stress

Smoking is the number one cause of chronic bronchitis and emphysema. Your condition will get worse faster if you smoke as little as two cigarettes a day. Toxic gases in tobacco smoke can prevent your body from getting enough oxygen.

There are many different methods to help you stop smoking. If you have tried one or two ways, don't give up! There are many different techniques available. Take the first step, and talk to your primary care provider today!

Regular exercise is a very important part of feeling healthy. Exercise strengthens your muscles so they need less oxygen. Exercise also helps you reduce stress, improves your appetite, and helps you sleep better. It is important to pace yourself and gradually increase your endurance. Check with your health care provider before starting an exercise program.

Stress can be a cause of shortness of breath that leads to anxiety. Anxiety makes you breathe faster and can make you panic. Learning

to relax and control stress can help you prevent shortness of breath. One-way to feel less short-of-breath is to do pursed-lip breathing. Pursed-lip breathing helps you exhale more fully so that you can take in more air when you breathe.

**Practice these steps so you'll know what to do when you begin to feel short of breath:**

1. Relax
2. Inhale slowly through your nose
3. Pucker your lips as if you were going to blow out a candle
4. Breathe out slowly and gently through your puckered lips

When you have COPD, you're more likely to develop a lung infection. To stay healthier, get prompt treatment at the first sign of illness.

**To avoid illness:**

- Wash your hands often
- Get a flu shot every year and ask your provider about the pneumonia vaccine
- Stay out of crowds, especially in the winter when more people have colds and flu
- Exercise regularly, eat a balanced diet and get enough sleep
- Take your medicine as prescribed

If you get sick, the sooner you get treatment, the more likely you are to prevent damage to your airways.

**Call your provider at the first sign of:**

- Fever or chills
- Tightness in your chest that does not go away with usual medicines
- Increased shortness of breath, wheezing or coughing
- Increased mucus production, or change in mucus color
- Swollen ankles

You can still live a full life with COPD. Take control of your health by quitting smoking, exercising, and being in tune with your own body.

---

Source: "Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease—Living with a Chronic Lung Condition", 1995.



## ASK AN EXPERT

### Be “In The Know” About Pre-Diabetes

Scott Johnson RKT, MS  
Tomah, VAMC

At least 16 million Americans have pre-diabetes. But what exactly does this mean? Pre-diabetes occurs when your blood glucose (sugar) is higher than normal but not high enough to be called diabetes.

Fasting (no food for 8 to 10 hours) Blood Sugar Levels	
Normal	65-100
Pre-diabetes	101-125
Diabetes	126 or higher at 2 different checks

If you don't take steps to lower your blood sugar levels, you may develop “full blown” type 2 diabetes within 10 years.

Diabetes is a condition in which the body either does not make enough insulin or does not use the insulin properly. This causes a build up of glucose (sugar) in the blood. Over many years, too much glucose (sugar) in the blood damages nerves and blood vessels. Possible diabetes related problems include:

- Eye damage, even blindness
- Stroke, heart disease
- Nerve problems
- Kidney disease
- Amputations

#### **You Are At Risk for Pre-Diabetes if:**

- You have an apple-shaped body (you carry your extra weight around your waist).
- Your waist measures 40 inches or more around the belly button (men).
- Your waist measures 35 inches or more around the belly button (women).
- Your blood pressure is more than 140/90.
- Your provider says you have insulin resistance. This is when your body cannot properly use insulin or sugar. This gets worse if you are obese.



# GOOD NEWS!!!!

## You can delay or prevent Type 2 diabetes.

### Here's how...

- Eat better. Plan your meals. The American Diabetes Association recommends that you eat several small meals (breakfast-lunch-dinner, plus 2 snacks) at the same time each day and choose high fiber and low fat foods. When dining out, split meals and avoid super-sizing.
- Get more exercise, increasing to a goal of 30 minutes of total physical activity on most days of the week.
- Lose some weight. Even 10-15 pounds will have a very positive effect.

### Tips To Increase Your Activity Level:

- Write down your goals and how you plan to achieve them.
- Buy a pedometer and count your steps (2000 steps equals approximately one mile).
- Walk on your lunch break.
- Park your car at the far end of the parking lot.
- Exercise with friends.
- Walk your dog and your dog

walks you!

- Consider strength training 2 or 3 times weekly to boost your calorie burning.
- Mix it up, and try different activities you enjoy, to better stick with it.

### FINALLY, pre-diabetes increases the risk for heart disease so....

- Lower your blood pressure to less than 140/90
- Lower LDL (bad cholesterol) to 100
- Lower triglycerides to 150
- Raise HDL (good cholesterol) to 40
- Stop smoking

For more information contact your healthcare provider. The American Diabetes Association (ADA) has information on healthier diet, fitness, and reducing risks for pre-diabetes. You can contact the ADA at 1-800-DIABETES or [www.diabetes.org](http://www.diabetes.org).

---

Sources: Diabetes in Control, Issue 195; Diabetes in Control, Issue 193; Diabetes in Control, Issue 176; Diabetes Care, 11/03; ADA, The Metabolic Syndrome, Are You At Risk?; ADA Pre-Diabetes Pamphlet, 12/8/03

*Your best source for information on your health will always be your doctor or health care provider. We hope this newsletter will encourage you to talk to your health care provider and ask questions about your health concerns.*

---

**Great Lakes VA  
Healthviews Editorial  
Committee:**

Jill Zahn  
Senior Editor, Milwaukee

Judi Bjork  
Iron Mountain

Lance Davis  
Madison

Kathleen Ford  
Hines

Kathy Johnson  
Tomah

Alfreda Rhodes-King  
North Chicago

Beverly Speer  
VA Chicago



Layout and design  
Kim Chapman  
Medical Media Service  
Milwaukee

**Main Phone Numbers  
for VISN 12 Hospitals**

Hines:	708-202-VETS (8387)
Iron Mountain:	906-774-3300
Madison:	608-256-1901
Milwaukee:	414-384-2000 or 1-888-469-6614
North Chicago:	1-800-393-0865 or 847-688-1900
Tomah:	1-800-USA-TOMAH 1-800-872-8662 or 608-372-3971
VA Chicago:	312-569-VETS (8387)

**“Ask An Expert” Question  
or Idea for Future Articles**

Do you have an “Ask An Expert” question or an idea for a future article? Your ideas can be e-mailed, mailed, or faxed to the Senior Editor.

E-mail address:

SrEditorGreatLakesVAHealthviews@med.va.gov

Mailing address:

Jill Zahn  
Milwaukee VA Medical Center Library  
5000 W. National Avenue  
Milwaukee, WI 53295  
Fax number: 414-382-5334

You can subscribe to this newsletter  
electronically through the  
VISN 12 internet site at  
<http://www.vagreatlakes.org>

Click on the *Public Affairs* button,  
then click on *Publications and Newsletters*.